

CREMATION,

ANCIENT AND MODERN;

THE HISTORY AND UTILITY OF FIRE-FUNERAL.

A Lecture

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

SUNDAY LECTURE SOCIETY,

ST. GEORGE'S HALL, LANGHAM PLACE,

ON

SUNDAY AFTERNOON, 14th MARCH, 1886,

BY

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London:

PUBLISHED BY THE SUNDAY LECTURE SOCIETY.

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1886.

PRICE THREEPENCE.

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SYLLABUS.

Exordium—Importance of the subject.

A. THE HISTORY OF FIRE-FUNERAL.

I.—Cremation in the Bronze Age. Its probably religious origin. Its connection with fire-worship. Not a Semitic custom. Prevalent among early Aryans; except the Persians. Its use among the Hindoos, Greeks, Romans, Keltic and Teutonic races. Its decline in Europe. Its recent revival in Italy, Germany, and England. First modern instances of Cremation. Rise and progress of the Cremation Society of England. Recent successful Cremations.

II.—An ancient Fire-funeral described—and compared with those of our day. Various systems now in use. Account of the Woking Crematory and the system there employed.

B. THE UTILITY OF FIRE-FUNERAL.

I.—Three advantages of Cremation over Burial: (*a*) the Sanitary, (*b*) the Economic, (*c*) the Moral. Minor advantages suggested.

II.—Objections to Cremation answered: (*a*) the *Æsthetic*, (*b*) the Religious, (*c*) the Sentimental, (*d*) the Social, (*e*) Miscellaneous.

Conclusion: Appeal to the public to assist the cause of Cremation.



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CREMATION, ANCIENT AND MODERN.

THE subject on which I have the honour to address you may commend itself to your attention on the ground of its importance. No subject can fail to be regarded by these audiences as important that bears closely on our social well-being; and that the subject of Cremation does this will hardly be denied. The question how we are to dispose of our dead is becoming, it is agreed, one of the chief social questions of the day. Our present Burial System, it is more and more felt, fails utterly to supply the answer. Some more satisfactory system must of necessity be soon adopted. Cremation, or Fire-funeral, offers itself as the best alternative, and consequently as the most desirable system to adopt till some better is devised. Let us know something of the history of this ancient custom: let us study it in the past and present; and try to form for ourselves a just estimate of its merits.

The origin of Cremation is lost in antiquity. We may, however, assume the practice to be of later date than simple interment. Fire-funeral obviously presupposes an acquaintance with the use of fire, which man in his most primitive condition did not possess; whereas at no time could he have wanted for a cave, or hollow tree-trunk, or some other natural recess, wherein his dead might be buried out of his sight. Cremation, then, implies some advance from primeval barbarism, and belongs to at least a rudimentary civilisation. Direct evidence for its use is first supplied us by those well-known barrows, or sepulchral mounds, which exist more or less numerous in most parts of the world, and nowhere in greater profusion than in the British Islands. In many of these mounds, as for instance in those around Stonehenge, have been discovered urns containing human remains that have clearly undergone some process of incineration. To what period of man's history such relics are to be assigned is a point on which authorities differ: some would place them as far back as the remote Age of Stone; but others refer them with greater probability to the considerably later Age of Bronze. Even this represents, as far as Europe is concerned, an antiquity of thousands of years.

What was it, we would fain learn, that first induced men to cremate? What led them to take such a startlingly new departure? Why did some one suddenly conceive the idea of setting fire to a human body? His motive must have been a powerful one: was it sanitary, sentimental, or religious? I cannot think that it was sanitary. In that distant epoch, when the living were not crowded together in such vast communities as ours, there was room enough and to spare for the bodies of the dead, and the sanitary problems, which are now so pressing, could hardly have arisen. Neither can I agree with the theory that Cremation was suggested by a feeling of friendship for the deceased, whose ashes were preserved as we preserve a lock of hair, or some other token of a dead friend. It must be borne in mind that in those days of ancestor-worship the deceased was regarded not so much with friendship as with superstitious veneration. Everything in the way of burial was done from his point of view, not, as common sense would direct, from the point of view of the survivors. The dead man was believed to retain all his corporal wants and feelings. Along with him in his grave must be interred armour to protect him, food to nourish him, his horse to carry him, his favourite wife to bear him company. It would have been looked upon as sacrilege to injure his body, unless obviously for his own advantage. But experience gradually taught that the body faded away through corruption into nothingness. What was it then that apparently survived and revisited the living in their dreams? It must needs be something holier, which the body only polluted and kept back from the land of spirits. Became it not, then, a religious duty to separate after death as speedily as possible this shadow from the unclean substance? And how better could this be effected than by dedicating the substance to that purifying element which, after his own ancestors, seemed worthiest of man's adoration? I have little doubt in my own mind that the custom of Cremation arose out of this early union of ancestor-worship and the worship of Fire.

On this theory we may expect to find, as we emerge from pre-historic twilight into the dawn of tradition and record, Fire-funeral commonest among those nations by whom fire continued to be worshipped, and correspondingly rare among those who were not, or had ceased to be, Fire-worshippers. And this, with one notable exception, to be mentioned in its place, is precisely what we do find. By the Egyptians and the Semitic peoples of Asia, who held fire in no special reverence, Fire-funeral was very seldom practised. A few instances of its use are

to be met with in Jewish history. It is recorded, for example, in the Book of Samuel (I. Sam. xxxi. 12) that the men of Jabesh-Gilead burnt the bodies of Saul and his sons; but such cases were exceptional. Cremation was at no time a recognised Semitic custom. But it was the recognised custom with that race which has for us a more special interest; that race from which most Europeans are descended; I mean the great Aryan or Indo-European family, once dwelling together, it is thought, by some inland Asiatic sea. These Aryans, as ethnological researches have ascertained, were most zealous in their worship of fire; and it is among the numerous branches into which the family became subdivided, that we find Cremation commonest, both in ancient and in modern times.

The Hindoos, who may claim to be considered the oldest representatives of the family, have always been very enthusiastic for the rite. In their eagerness to secure the immortality it is supposed to confer, they have been known to anticipate by its means the slow advent of natural death. We are told how Calanus, one of the so-called gymnosophists of India, in the time of Alexander the Great, had himself thus prematurely immolated. In modern India, a like practice is not unfrequent when men are stricken with some mortal disease. Over the greater part of that country Cremation is in any case the orthodox method of disposing of the dead; and as the corpse is laid upon the pile that Fire is invoked to consume it which the dead man worshipped in his life. We have here a present testimony to the supposed original connection between Fire-funeral and Fire-worship.

The Persians, according to Herodotus, did not burn but buried their dead. Their sacerdotal class, the Median Magi, laid the bodies on the ground to be devoured by birds. This sect, the Fire-Worshippers *par excellence* of antiquity, form the notable exception I announced to my general rule. Taught by their great law-giver Zoroaster they pushed Aryan notions to an extreme, and regarded fire as too sacred an element to be polluted by any contact with dead humanity. Their religious descendants, the Parsees, still expose their dead on lofty pillars of stone, commonly called the Towers of Silence, where vultures expedite, almost as rapidly as fire could, the slow process of decomposition.

Turning now to the less distant members of the Indo-European family, we learn from the Homeric poems and other sources, that Cremation was prevalent in the Heroic Age—about B.C. 1000—among the Greeks of Europe and Asia Minor. In the classical times of Greece, that is, from the 6th to the 4th century B.C.,

both Cremation and Burial were practised contemporaneously. Solon the law-giver was of his own desire cremated. The teacher Socrates, on being offered his choice between the two modes, left the matter entirely to his friends. The real Socrates, he said, would be far away in the world of spirits; what was it to him whether they buried or burnt his body? It would be well, perhaps, if more would imitate this philosophical attitude of the wisest of the Greeks.

Among the Romans, the antiquity of Cremation is evinced by their burial term "*Funus*," from which our own word "*Funeral*" is, of course, derived. "*Funus*" is etymologically akin to "*fumus*," *smoke*, and denoted primarily "a burning body." But as interment, no less than Cremation, was early practised by the Italian races, the term "*funus*" came to be applied indifferently to either kind of funeral. Through the Republic, and under the early emperors, the two customs flourished side by side; but Earth-funeral tended to become the more popular. Fire-funeral was ultimately abandoned in Rome towards the close of the 4th century of our era. Its gradual disuse was no doubt owing to the increasing influence of the Christians, who were persistently opposed to the practice, though it was nowhere forbidden in the New Testament.

Meanwhile, among the Aryan nations of Northern Europe, Cremation was practically universal. Cæsar is our authority for its use among the continental Gauls, who were doubtless imitated in this respect by their kinsmen the Britons. The Druids, at all events, cremated; so also did the Danes, and the inhabitants of the Scandinavian Peninsula. And Tacitus praises the unostentatious manner in which the rite was conducted by our ancestors, the Germans.

The spread of Christianity in the Dark Ages abolished the practice of Cremation throughout Europe; but it flourished undisturbed in other parts of the world. Besides the Hindoos, many tribes in central Asia have never ceased to employ the rite; which obtained also, as far back as we can discover, among the Japanese in the far East, and the Mexicans, the most civilized aborigines of America.

The revival of Cremation in Europe belongs for the most part to the present century, and rests chiefly on sanitary grounds. In Italy, where the movement in its favour has been most energetic, the first modern Cremations were performed in 1822 upon the remains of Mr. Williams and the poet Shelley. These Cremations were performed in a very rude manner, but they answered their

purpose fairly well. Since that time proper Crematories have been built in Rome, Milan, and other leading cities of the kingdom, where the practice may now be said to be quite firmly established. In the other Latin countries, progress has not been equally rapid; but a decided step in the right direction has been taken in France by the Parisian Municipality, which has agreed to the opening of a Crematory temple, at the cost of £8,000, in the great cemetery of Père-la-Chaise.

In Germany, various experiments in Cremation have been made with great success, and there seems little doubt that the practice will once more become popular in that country. The Northern nations are still behindhand; but by the end of the century, if not sooner, the rite will doubtless be at least permissive in all the principal European States. In America, both North and South, much attention has been given to the matter, and from the numerous Cremation Societies that have sprung up in the New World, we may shortly look for important results.

In our own country Cremation has been advocated, and at intervals practised, for a longer period than might be supposed. The word Cremation occurs in our literature as early as 1658, when Sir Thomas Browne, in his quaintly-written essay on *Hydriotaphia, or Urn-Burial*, advocated a return to the practice. Actual cases of Cremation are recorded in the latter part of the 18th, and the beginning of the present century. The earliest instance, as far as I am aware, is afforded by a MRS. PRATT, who in 1769 was burned, according to her own directions, near Tyburn Turnpike. But anything like a scientific treatment of the matter, whether by word or deed, was reserved for this generation. In January, 1874, Sir Henry Thompson drew general attention to the subject by his powerful and practical article in the "*Contemporary Review*." This article, reprinted with additions, led to the formation in the same year of the Cremation Society of England. In 1878, the Council of the Society purchased a freehold site at St. John's, near Woking, Surrey, and there erected a suitable Crematorium. The building remained for some time unused, owing to a doubt that existed as to the legality of Cremation in England. Meanwhile the late Captain Hanham had a private Crematorium erected in his own grounds at Manston, in Dorsetshire, where two cremations were performed in 1883, and another shortly afterwards. It was still uncertain, however, how far public Cremation was practicable. The point was before long decided under remarkable circumstances. You will probably recollect the curious case that occurred early in 1884, when Dr.

Price caused much excitement at Cardiff by burning the body of his child on the top of a mountain. In deciding this case, Sir James Stephen emphatically declared that Cremation, if effected without nuisance, was perfectly legal. This decision encouraged the Cremation Society to throw open their Crematory to the public. An attempt was made in the same year to carry through Parliament a Bill which should place Cremation on a more definite footing, and provide it, like Burial, with all needful restrictions. The attempt was, for the time being, unsuccessful. The Society therefore announced on their own responsibility that, certain precautions being duly observed, they were willing to undertake a Cremation. I shall state these precautions later on. The Society on its part was now ready to commence operations; but it was still some little time before any one came forward to be cremated. At length, however, the hour arrived; and with it, not the man, but the woman. The Crematory was made use of for the first time on the 25th of March, 1885; the body cremated being that of a lady. The Cremation lasted one hour, and was perfectly successful. Since then two or three more Cremations have been performed at the same place, the result in each case being equally satisfactory. More recently still a fourth Cremation has been performed with success at Manston, Dorsetshire.

Such in brief is the history of Cremation: what improvements have so many ages brought about in its practice? The change, we may reply, from a barbarous to a civilised—from an empirical to a scientific method. An ancient Fire-funeral, as described by classical writers, was at best but an elaborately rude performance; a brilliant waste of material, time, and money. Religious in its origin—or at any rate in its development—it differed more in degree than kind from an ordinary sacrifice. It took place on consecrated ground. The pyre, of vast dimensions, was but an exaggerated altar to the Fire-god—that mediator between earth and heaven who was to waft the dead man on his spiritual journey. The body was brought through the streets in solemn state; a train of mourners accompanied the bier, and marked their steps with doleful music. When the sacred field was reached, the last kiss was given, and the last farewell uttered to the corpse, which was then reverently laid, still resting on its wooden bier, on the raised centre of the funeral pile. The friends and relations of the deceased, gathering round, sang in monotone a lugubrious dirge, while the nearest of kin, with averted eyes, set a blazing torch to the logs. No attempt was made to conceal

any part of the spectacle from the bystanders, but perfumes and balsams were scattered on the pyre to neutralise the offence that must otherwise have been given to the senses. Oil, too, was sometimes added to the flame; for it was looked upon as a singular blessing to be reduced to ashes quickly. Living victims were, as a rule, immolated in the dead man's company, and a certain skill was shown in the choice and disposition of their bodies; but the details, though curious enough, are not such as I need trouble you with. While this holocaust was being completed, processions would be formed, and games, and even contests would take place round the pyre. When the flame sank low the glowing embers were quenched with wine, and the white bones of the dead man were collected. These also were steeped in wine and anointed with oil, and finally deposited for lasting preservation in an earthenware or metal urn.

The whole scene was characterised by a combination of superstitious ritual and fantastic orgy; but if it lacked the sobriety of our decent obsequies, it possessed its full share of that poetic glamour which seems inseparable from barbaric rites. The genius of a Homer or a Virgil would be sorely tried to extract any poetry from a modern funeral—an ordinary Earth-funeral, that is to say; but the same poets have given us highly-wrought descriptions of the Fire-funerals of their own period. Homer's account, in particular, of the Cremation of Patroclus, is justly celebrated. On this occasion, we are told, the funeral pile attained the enormous dimensions of 100 feet square. The height is not mentioned, but it was probably less; for when the dead man's body had been laid upon the pile, his friend Achilles flung upon the top in rapid succession four horses, two hounds, and twelve captive Trojans, besides the carcases of innumerable sheep and oxen. For all its size, however, the pyre would not burn properly when lighted. Special sacrifice, it appeared, had to be offered to the winds; when this had been done, all went off well. A wonderful picture is then drawn of the pyre blazing fiercely all night, the winds tossing the flame about in all directions, and the lonely figure of Achilles pacing pensively to and fro and bewailing his lost comrade.

We must not, however, be too much fascinated by the poetic aspect of these ancient fire-funerals. More practically regarded they present numerous features that the modern Cremationist would be the first to condemn. Their waste of material, and consequent costliness, their unwieldy disproportion of time and means to the required end, their disregard of convenience, and even safety; all these would not now be tolerated. By civilised

communities, that is; for in some parts of the world, where old customs remain unchanged, Cremation is still as clumsily performed as in the days of Homer. But Europe is more progressive—we order these things better in the West. Our modern Crematories vie with each other in the expedition, economy, and salutariness of their several systems.

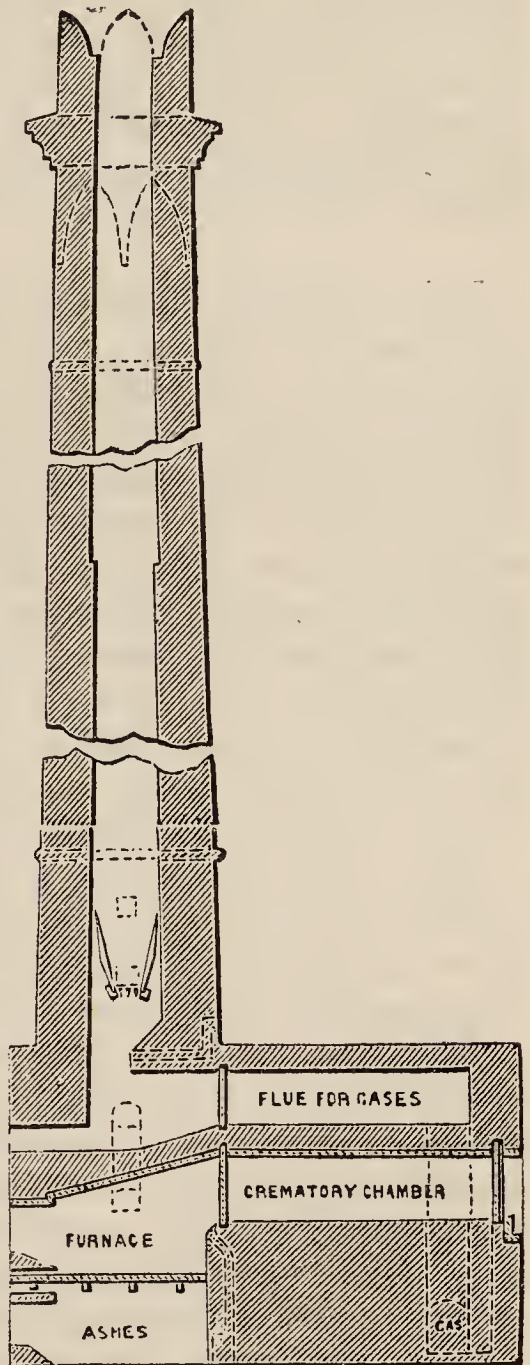
Of all these systems two in particular seem most likely to prevail; one, that of Mr. Fredk. Siemens, the other, that of Professor Gorini. The Siemens system is most popular in Germany, and is perhaps the more efficient of the two for town purposes. Its method is to effect combustion by means of heated air. I do not propose, however, to go into details about this system, but wish rather to explain to you the rival system of Gorini, which is in use at Milan and in other Italian cities, and is the pattern adopted by our own Cremation Society. My lecture would be incomplete without some account of the first English Crematorium and the manner of its working.

From Woking Station about half an hour's walk along the Basingstoke Canal brings one to the village of St. John's, near which, on the road leading to Knap Hill, is the Crematorium. Nothing could be more charming than the rural aspect of the neighbourhood with its sandy heaths and picturesque pine woods, to which the Chobham Ridges form an effective background. If I may venture to paraphrase the well-known words of Shelley I would say that it might make one in love with Death, to think one should be cremated in so sweet a place. The Crematory stands upon an enclosed acre of ground, which is at present somewhat uncultivated, but before long, it is hoped, will be laid out in a suitable manner: a belt of trees shuts off all view of it from the road. On entering the grounds one sees before him a rectangular building of brick, whose most conspicuous feature is a tall chimney. The building is surrounded by an outer wall some 7 or 8 feet in height. Passing through a door in this wall one finds himself in a sort of quadrangle, 40 feet by 20, in the centre of which stands the Crematory proper, an oblong structure of stock-brick, 17 feet by 8. At each end of this structure is observed a large iron door; one is for the admission of the body into the Crematory, the other belongs to the furnace. Overhead at each end is a sloping roof, which extends to the outer wall, and serves for shelter from rain. In each of the side walls four small apertures attract the attention; these are the necessary openings for inspection, by means of which one can be assured that all is going on satisfactorily.

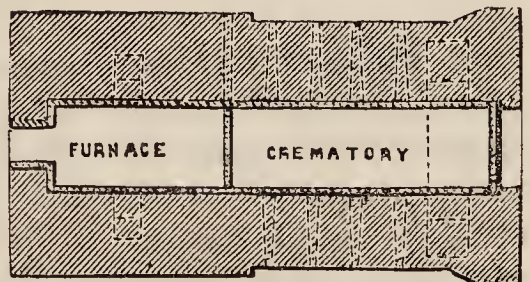
The interior of the Crematory consists of two principal parts, the crematory chamber, 8 feet in length, and the furnace: they are separated from each other by a partition of iron. The rest of the interior is taken up by the receiver and the flues. At the base of the chimney is a second furnace.

The process of Cremation is as follows :—

The body, enclosed in a suitable shroud, or, if necessary, an elm coffin, is first placed upon a framework of iron bars, beneath which is a tray for the reception of the ashes. By means of rollers, frame work and all are then passed into the crematory chamber, which is forthwith closed to the sight. The partition at the other end of the chamber is then withdrawn, and flames from the furnace are drawn in by side-flues, and play freely round the body. The intense heat causes almost instantaneous decomposition. For two or three minutes noxious gases are thrown off, which pass down other side flues, and thence make their way into the receiver, just above the crematory chamber. There they undergo a second combustion, in what is called the “pilot fire,” that is, a grating of burning coke at the base of the chimney. All organic remains are thus absolutely destroyed: no noxious matters whatever can issue from the chimney: the gas that does issue is unaccompanied by smoke and mixes harmlessly with the atmosphere. Complete combustion is effected in a period varying from 90 minutes to 2 hours. During the



LONGITUDINAL SECTION OF THE WORKING CREMATORY.



PLAN OF THE WORKING CREMATORY.

whole process no sight, sound, or smell of any kind informs bystanders of what is happening. The resulting ashes, which settle in the tray, are perfectly white and inoffensive. They are placed by the Society at the disposal of the representative of the deceased. At present only one representative is permitted to attend the Cremation, during which, as I need hardly add, no access whatever is permitted to strangers.

It is now time to inquire what advantages this ancient custom of Cremation, newly revived under such different conditions, possesses over the still more ancient custom of Burial. For observe that the Cremationist is not content with showing that his method for disposal of the dead is a good one: he desires to prove that the conventional method is a bad one, radically wrong in every way, and attended with disastrous consequences; and that Cremation possesses corresponding advantages which not only warrant but necessitate its adoption in the other's stead. For the present purpose it will suffice if I mention three such advantages, and endeavour to demonstrate them to your satisfaction. These three may be distinguished under the separate titles of the Sanitary, the Economic, and the Moral Advantage.

The Sanitary Advantage constitutes the true, or any rate the chief, *raison d'être* of modern Cremation, and by its experimental proof or disproof the system will ultimately stand or fall. It may be presented briefly thus:

Every animal body after death is resolved more or less rapidly (according to its surrounding conditions) into its constituent elements, carbonic acid, ammonia, water, lime, phosphorus, &c., &c. During this process, commonly called decomposition, certain gases are generated, which, together with various putrescent matters that they hold in suspension, are both disagreeable and highly dangerous to any human being who may be brought in contact with them. The longer the process is delayed the more disagreeable does it become, and the greater in proportion is the risk incurred. The ordinary system of Burial is to seal up the dead in leaden coffins, which are rendered as impervious to the air as possible, but from which the gases manage slowly to escape, or if hindered at first break forth at last with incredible violence, sufficient sometimes to burst open the shell with a noise that has been compared to the report of a cannon. This system of ours when most successful retards decomposition for some twenty years or more, thus giving the fatal influences the best part of a generation in which to work.

And what it is they work we now know ; we have learnt it from many frightful revelations. There are doubtless present here not a few who can remember the state of things that existed in the Metropolis, little more than a quarter of a century ago, in the last days of intramural interment ; when the dead of London, literally heaped on one another, contaminated the air and wrought havoc among the living. I do not speak of such exceptional cases as that of the two grave-diggers, who, in 1841, while descending into a re-opened grave at Aldgate, were overpowered by the concentrated effluvia, and perished on the spot. I allude rather to the mischief perpetrated in a thousand secret but not untraceable ways by the gases roaming in a more diluted state. Headache, sickness, ulcerated sore throat, fever, dysentery—a truly formidable list might be made of illnesses often distinctly traceable to the proximity of graveyards. Mr. Chadwick's Report on Intramural Interment, published in 1843, gives sufficiently horrible statistics on the subject. I will not nauseate you by recapitulating them. Such things, luckily, are of the past as far as the Metropolis is concerned. But the same deadly work is being carried on, whether at Norwood, or Ilford, or Kensal Green, or any other of our suburban cemeteries, and the same results must eventually follow. It is only a question of time. The roominess of the Bronze Age is not shared by this Age of Brick. We revisit after a short interval spots we remember as rural solitudes, and find sprung up on them, as it were in a night, a whole village of shops and houses ; in a year or two that cemetery in the fields will be situated in the centre of a small town. I repeat, it is a mere question of time that must elapse before the suburban living and the suburban dead are in closest proximity to each other, when no more than the width of a street, perhaps not even that, will separate them, and the former calamities will arise afresh. Even the country cemeteries but defer for a season the inevitable day. Sooner or later the increasing population, with its inexorable demand for standing room, will approach those cemeteries' confines and suffer harm from their inmates, breathing air contaminated by them, and drinking water that they have polluted. "It is beyond dispute," says Sir H. Thompson, "that the margin of safety as to time grows narrower and narrower year by year, and that the pollution of wells and streams which supply the living must ere long arise wherever we bury the dead in this country."

"But could not all this be rectified," ask the advocates of interment, "by a modification of our Burial System, without

resorting to Cremation? If bodies were inclosed in porous wicker baskets instead of leaden coffins, so as to ensure immediate contact with Earth, would not swift and harmless decomposition ensue?" This is practically Mr. Seymour Haden's proposal of Earth to Earth Burial. There is something, perhaps, to be said in its favour. It is less artificial and more expeditious than the usual method. It involves less trouble and expense. But it is no real improvement on the existing order: I am not sure but that in some respects it is even worse. The decomposition it effects is neither swift nor harmless. Under the most favourable conditions a body would take about three years to be decomposed by the agency of earth alone; and during this time there would be the danger not only of its polluting the soil, air, and water in its immediate neighbourhood, but also of its disseminating contagious germs of various specific diseases. These germs increase and multiply underground with alarming rapidity, and are brought up to the surface in many unexpected ways. Darwin has taught us the work done by earth-worms in this direction. The eminent French chemist M. Pasteur, whom none will consider a mean authority in these matters, has clearly shown that the destructive splenic disease is thus communicated to cattle when pasturing on ground beneath which diseased cattle have been buried. And the same principle would hold good in the case of maladies more incident to man; typhoid fever, for instance, and even cholera.

The idea that fresh earth is the best disinfectant is simply a delusion. Ask Nature herself what is the greatest purifier, and her very echoes will answer—Fire. By Cremation alone prompt and perfect decomposition is achieved. In a brief space the constituent parts of the body have been returned to the elements, each to each: no noxious gases have been let loose upon the world, and nothing remains over but harmless ash. In brief, Cremation is at the time innocuous to the living, and effectually prevents any future injury from the dead. We are justified in claiming this as a Sanitary Advantage.

And even if Burial could be conducted in such a manner that decomposition was arrested altogether, or in such remote and uninhabited places that no harm could happen from it to the community, we should still plead in favour of Cremation its Economic Advantage, which I now proceed to set before you.

The material elements of every animal body are required after death to enter into the vegetable world, and so more or less directly contribute towards the food of other animals. Thus the same particles pass through an endless cycle of alternate animal

and vegetable forms: from the animal that yields carbonic acid to the flower of the field which lives on it, from the vegetable formed of carbon to the man who eats the vegetable; and thus the balance of Nature is kept up. But we in our little way do our best to upset that balance, and are punished accordingly. There is, as you know, only a limited quantity of material in the world, and though none of this can ever be lost, much may be rendered temporarily useless. This is what we render the dead bodies we bury in the earth, and in this manner we interfere with Nature's designs. To eternal Nature this may not matter much; but to her ephemeral children it matters a great deal. If we stow away an annually increasing amount of material which, for our own sakes, is required to enter the vegetable world, we ultimately straiten our own resources, and this not inappreciably. For in order to replace the material which we thus wantonly waste, we are obliged to purchase at a considerable cost essentially similar material from other countries that may be able to spare it. Let me make this clearer by an illustration. In 1883, according to the Board of Trade returns, there was imported into the United Kingdom, chiefly for agricultural purposes, 86,346 tons' weight of bones, representing a value of £617,748. A large sum of money, in these hard times, to be spent unprofitably. And why unprofitably? Because needlessly. From an annual mortality of 80,000 in London alone, there might be derived by means of Cremation more than 1,000 tons of ashes and bone earth, to say nothing of other solid matters which would be resolved into gaseous food for plants, and so indirectly become serviceable to man. All this material we do our best to render for an indefinite period unavailable. Nor is it any excuse that we are employing in its stead material that was similarly made useless in the past. What would we think of a man who with a view to becoming rich kept burying in the earth greater and greater sums of money, and taking out in place of them proportionately smaller sums which his father and grandfather had buried there before him? We should laugh at such a person, I suppose, and suggest to him to lay out his surplus income to interest. But the conduct we ridicule is our own. We forget that nature allows not only interest but compound interest for invested capital. We reject her proffered usury, and deliberately hide a precious talent in the earth.

Nor is this the whole of the matter. Not content with hiding our treasure we must needs have a costly napkin to hide it in, and so pay doubly for our folly. Before this wasteful process of burial can be effected a heavy initial expense has to be incurred. Think

of the money lavished on those senseless appurtenances of a funeral—those idols of the grave, as they might be called—which we worship so fanatically! But these, I may be told, could at any rate be dispensed with: they are not a necessity. Indeed, I should be glad to think that people will before long consent to do without those hideous conveyances and grotesquely attired attendants we at present associate with a funeral. But even if these and similar items were subtracted there would remain a heavy price to be paid for grave interment, however simply performed. The very earth cannot be broken free of charge: we must pay for the pit in which to bury our treasure.

Now of course I do not mean to imply that Cremation can be effected—properly effected, that is—for nothing. But I do mean to say that the cost of a Cremation, as conducted by the Cremation Society, is very small indeed in comparison with funeral expenses. What is the average cost, not including the conveyance of body, of an ordinary middle-class London funeral? Not less, it is estimated, than £12. The total cost of a Cremation at Woking, also exclusive of transit charges, amounts at present to just half that sum; and when the practice becomes more prevalent this cost will be very much reduced. The expense of transit depends, of course, upon distance. For Metropolitan Cremations a Crematory could be erected at Ilford, which is only seven miles from Liverpool Street. Even to Woking, which is three times that distance from Waterloo, a body may be conveyed in a suitable hearse, for £5 10s.; so that the *entire* cost of a Cremation, even at present, need not exceed £12.

Yet further, the economic advantage of Cremation, or what comes in this case to the same thing, disadvantage of Burial, must before long make itself felt in the continual diminution of productive land, as opposed to the increasing demand for it. Every new cemetery that is consecrated is, in the words of the late Bishop of Manchester, “so many acres of land withdrawn from the food-producing area of the country.” Whereas, if Cremation were the custom, there would be no absolute necessity for cemeteries at all. The ashes of the dead, if not scattered on the fields, their rightful destination, might be kept in detached repositories, built specially for the purpose in convenient spots. But granting that general burying grounds were preferred, they would not have to be either numerous or extensive. The acre of land on which the Woking Crematory stands could accommodate with proper management 1,000,000 urns, or more than a year’s mortality of the whole of the United Kingdom. At this rate one

square mile of cemetery would last the nation for more than 600 years! far longer than Woking Necropolis, with its 2000 wasted acres, can hope to serve for the dead of London alone.

So trebly manifest is the Economic advantage of Cremation.

There remains the Moral Advantage, which is twofold in its character, for in this case virtue is really and truly its own reward. The practice of Cremation is both moral in itself, and tends to exercise a good moral influence. I am speaking with perfect seriousness. The ill consequences of Burial being admitted—and who will deny them?—it becomes for everyone a moral duty to set his face against a system so fraught with harm, and support a rival system so free from it. I assure you that as the facts of Burial and the counter facts of Cremation are brought home to me more and more I am perfectly amazed at the indifference with which men behave in this matter. We profess to care for our fellow creatures, and often complain that in our short lives we have so few chances of serving them; yet how many neglect to avail themselves of the chance if not of benefiting, of at least not injuring mankind in their deaths. If every testator, instead of giving directions for his burial, were to deprecate being made after his death a source of mischief to the community, and insist upon his remains being cremated, we should not have to wait very long for the Burial System to be ignominiously deposed and Cremation triumphantly installed in its place—a consummation, as I think, most devoutly to be wished. Most testators, however, think differently, if they think at all about the matter. The Burial System is still allowed to reign, and Cremation still stands at the door and knocks. But woe to the state that disregards its appeal! What a nation sows it must expect to reap. And every time—if I may say it without offence—that a human body is planted in the earth, seed sown in corruption to bring forth a hundred-fold its maleficent poison-fruit, a great and grievous wrong is committed, for which ourselves or our children will assuredly have to pay.

But Cremation, as I said, is not only in itself more moral than Burial: its moral influence is beyond all comparison better. The assurance one would have (if the practice were established), that after his death he would mix harmlessly with the elements, could not be otherwise than morally good for him. It would make him look with more composure upon Death. It would divest the King of Terrors of that repulsive garb in which the Burial System has clothed His dread Majesty. With Cremation universal, less

chance would be given to the fancy to dwell morbidly on Death's externals. We should gradually eliminate from our funereal literature much fustian about "worms, tombs and epitaphs," ghosts and skeletons, shrouds and cerements, and many other such bug-bear ideas. One dread in particular, from which some of the strongest intellects have not been free, would be effectually removed. I mean the dread of premature burial. Such a fate of indescribable horror has no doubt become, in the present state of medical science, next door to impossible; but people cannot forget that it has occurred, and that, however improbable, it *may* occur again, and the bare imagination of it is fearful. I suspect that there are very few among us who have at no time in their lives been haunted by the apprehension that *perhaps*, after some unconscious interval, they may re-awake to the palpable darkness and oppressive atmosphere of the tomb, where, far beyond all hope of rescue, their stifled shrieks will be unheard, and their frantic struggles unavailing. With Cremation, such a picture could never become a reality. If by any unhappy chance—practically, however, out of the question—some death-resembling catalepsy baffled the most careful medical inspection, and any breath of life yet lingered in the form when placed within the crematory chamber, the terrific heat it would there encounter would at once extinguish it in altogether painless death :

"Th' intense atom glows
a moment, then is quenched in a most cold repose."

Who would not wish to be thus delivered from the *possibility* of the living death? Who would not welcome a system that for ever relieved mankind of all dread of such a crowning horror? If Cremation offered no more than this, we might surely say to it, "for this relief much thanks."

Such, then, are the chief advantages, to wit, Sanitary, Economic, and Moral, that are claimed for Cremation over interment. I will not tax your patience by dwelling on minor points, further than to suggest a comparison between the convenience, privacy, and decorum of the one process, conducted carefully within doors; and the inconvenience of the other, conducted necessarily in the open air, often carelessly and indecorously hurried over, and fraught with all the risks that may arise from bad weather and damp grass. These and similar considerations will occur to every one. I proceed to discuss in what time remains to me certain specific objections that are urged against Cremation: objections which, being honestly entertained or industriously promulgated, have no doubt increased in this particular instance that general

disfavour with which a naturally conservative people regards new ideas.

The first of these objections is the purely æsthetic one, that Cremation is an offensive process to those who may be obliged to witness it. The sight and smell of a burning body is described by imaginative people as something dreadful; and so perhaps it might be, if either seen or smelt. The æsthetic objection might have been urged with some justice against the unscientific Cremations of former times; but as applied to those of our own day it is grossly unfair, and may be met with a simple denial. A properly conducted Cremation in a modern Crematorium is, according to the testimony of eye-witnesses, altogether inoffensive: no one need see anything of the actual operation unless he pleases; and even then, if I may be allowed the paradox, there is nothing to see; nothing to cause horror, at all events: of smell there is absolutely nothing. Therefore they speak unskilfully who raise this objection; or, if their knowledge be more, it must be clouded by their prejudice. In either case the æsthetic opponent need not any longer detain us.

The next objection—a religious one—is more important: people are still so much swayed in these matters by religious ideas: though not as formerly in favour of Cremation. Many of our orthodox friends object to the practice as unchristian, being contrary to Christian custom and opposed to Christian doctrine. Let us admit that the practice is contrary to Christian custom, by which is meant, I suppose, the general custom of Christian nations. But this only affects the religious argument in so far as it represents the particular usage of the early Christians. Very little indeed of our civilisation is in this sense other than unchristian. Our literature is modelled on the classics: we adopt Greek art and science: our polity, jurisprudence, social life—all these are independent of what the early Christians did or did not. Why must we make a concession to the Church in the matter of death, and go on burying because the early Christians did so? *They* buried, among other reasons, because it was then cheap. On the same principle *we* ought not to bury because it is now dear. “But the Founder of Christianity was buried!” Not in our sense, at any rate. Let Christians give up the leaden coffin and the grave, and go back to the hollow rock, if they really mean an *Imitatio Christi*.

But many worthy people maintain that Cremation would somehow interfere with the doctrine of immortality, or at least the faith in

that doctrine. The late Bishop of Lincoln gave it as his opinion that the practice would tend to injure the belief in the resurrection of the body. Of the *natural* body, did the Bishop mean? But who that reflects for a moment on the subject can believe, as it is, in such a bodily resurrection as the less enlightened of the early Christians looked for, by whom the second advent was daily, almost hourly expected? Does anyone still seriously suppose that the coffin is a kind of safe in which the body is temporarily preserved, to be taken out again intact after some final conflagration? The most ignorant must perceive, unless he wilfully closes his eyes to the fact, that for nineteen centuries buried Christians have mouldered away—coffins and all, for the most part—and their particles been scattered to the four corners of the earth. And not only scattered, but transmuted through every form of metempsychosis. Omnipotence itself might stagger at the task of reuniting them. The whole animal and vegetable world would have to be ransacked for the constituent elements of one man; and when found, innumerable rivals might put in a claim for them. What was even the Sadducees' problem of the seven husbands to the problem that must be faced by the believer in bodily resurrection—the problem, unto which of the seventy times seven who have had the same fleeting particles to wife, those particles will eventually belong? What of the bodies devoured by wild beasts? What of those committed to the deep, and its inmates? But the point does not deserve serious discussion. The crude belief, whose injury the Bishop deprecated, was practically overthrown by St. Paul himself, who in his great argument for the raising of the dead, draws an express distinction between the natural and the spiritual body. The belief in the resurrection of *that* body, which amounts merely to a belief in some sort of personal immortality, would of course remain wholly unaffected by Cremation. Too many righteous persons have been burnt or otherwise destroyed, either by accident or men's hands, for the doctrine to be endangered in this respect. The well-known argument from the blessed martyrs, which was quoted with approval by the late Lord Shaftesbury, is after all the best weapon to employ against our doctrinal objector, taken as it is from an orthodox armoury. No Christian believes that the souls of those martyrs perished necessarily in the flames that consumed their bodies; nor would any, I presume, grant immortality to Latimer and deny it to Mrs. Pratt.

Enough, however, as concerning the religious objection; it cannot much longer be seriously advanced. Many, in fact, of the leading clergymen, once strongly opposed to Cremation, are now

expressing themselves in favour of the practice. May they always set the laity so excellent an example.

The next objection, which is also very important, perhaps more so than the last, is one of sentiment. Cremation, say many, is disrespectful to the dead, and revolting to our feelings of humanity: it would also destroy all those time-hallowed associations that are connected with Burial. The idea that Cremation is disrespectful to the dead is by no means a new one: it influenced men's minds in remote antiquity. Among the ancient Greeks, for example, were found many to protest against the seeming barbarity of Fire-funeral. One poet, cited by Eustathius, goes so far as to implore Prometheus to steal back his gift of fire, which men turned to such a cruel use.

We have here, in fact, a survival of the old-world superstition that the dead body retains feeling, and that to consume it by fire is to inflict some kind of torture upon it. Those who, when the matter is thus plainly presented, would be ashamed to confess to such a childish notion, take refuge, generally, in an *argumentum ad hominem*. "Would you like," they ask, "to commit to the flames the dead body of any one dear to you?" Well, I think it would be at least as pleasant as to feel that I was reserving it for the worms. It is a choice of evils. If I do not commit that body to the flames I must commit it to the earth, to undergo a more dreadful transformation. And with what result? Precisely the same in the end as if it had been consigned in the first instance to the furnace. It cannot be too often or too emphatically urged that, whether you burn or bury your dead, the ultimate result arrived at is the same, the difference being that if you bury you take two decades to accomplish what by burning may be effected in two hours. Nature requires for her grand purposes the material elements of each dead body, and with or without your consent she will have them—twenty years—two hundred years—two thousand years hence: there is no finally evading her demand. And with Nature there is no sentiment, neither respect of persons. The deceased may have combined all human excellences, and attained all human glory; but Nature summons him to assist in her economy, and he must go. Go he must, and you cannot respect him more than by letting him go at once: if you delay him, you do but cause him to go less nobly. Which process is more truly and rationally respectful to the dead, more significant, that is, of our love and veneration for them: the process which returns them to Nature through slow stages of detestable putres-

cence, or that which resolves them into their elements "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye," and altogether inoffensively, is a question I will ask your unbiassed judgments to decide.

And with regard to those associations that are connected with Burial, which Cremation threatens to break up—what, after all, do they amount to? It seems to me that all the healthy sentiment in the matter is on the side of Cremation, not against it. No doubt a certain conventional poetry attaches to the village churchyard. We picture to ourselves the calm autumn evening, the secluded thorp, the grey church with its ivy-mantled tower, and God's acre couching by its side, overshadowed by tall trees, the perfect image of rest and peace. We linger in reverent fancy and admire the mossed headstones with their quaint devices grouped around in orderly disorder. We contemplate in the solemn twilight their dim record of man's brief existence, and moralise the sad scene in the poet's formula:—

"Beneath those rugged elms, that yew-tree's shade,
Where heaves the turf in many a mould'ring heap,
Each in his narrow cell for ever laid,
The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep."

But presently a faint breeze begins to move, and a strange sickly odour is borne to our senses: an evil-looking exhalation rises from the ground; it seems to cling to us with a clammy embrace. And what in the name of mystery is that weird, bluish light which hovers near us for a moment, then flits erratically from one grave to another? One might think it some spirit of the tombs, risen up in wrath against those who interred it. And spirit in one sense it is, though to the eye of science but carburetted hydrogen, for it is the foul gas that emanates from decaying humanity, and is kindled by the touch of oxygen into that spectral flame.

Sight and odour force upon our minds the thought of all that occasions them both. Our imagination descends and busies itself among the nameless horrors that are taking place beneath us. We turn away from the scene in disgust: all the charm of the surrounding has disappeared. We reject with scorn the pleasing illusions of the poet; they do not harmonise with our new train of thoughts. What is it to us that here, perchance, are laid "hearts once pregnant with celestial fire?" We think rather of the bodies, still certainly pregnant with terrestrial fever-germs.

And let anyone who imagines that an inviolable sanctity belongs to God's acre, and that the forefathers of the hamlet are laid really for ever in their narrow cells, reflect on what has been and

will be again the treatment of overcrowded cemeteries; how the dead are packed closer and closer together till not even that ingenious process known to grave diggers as “managing” can find any more space for them; when a sort of redistribution takes place, and the viler remains are contemptuously flung aside—often actually sold for what they will fetch—to make room for wealthier new-comers. Or a new railroad, perhaps, will cut its way through the abandoned graveyard, with resultant scandals that may be imagined. One naturally contrasts with this precarious and impermanent repose of the dead what might be indeed an inviolable sanctuary, the grounds, namely, of a well-built Crematorium. We should have in them a natural garden, with open lawns, flower-bordered walks, surrounding elms, and, best of all, uncontaminated air. Hundreds and thousands of cinerary urns could be stored, with every ornament that artistic taste could suggest, either in the corridors of the crematory temple itself, or in private chapels adjoining it, or in marble pyramids, at once graceful and durable, built in long symmetrical alignments, something on the plan of the so-called Druidical circles. There for centuries might the inurned remain undisturbed, in as permanent a resting place as this world of change admits of. Our dead would still be above the surface, would still be visited by the common light of day: the poet might cherish the fancy that their more ethereal elements still hovered round him in the air, moved gladly in the wind, and rustled in the leaves; the pious could contemplate at will, not some sculptured effigy, but the very ashes of their ancestors, without shame and without repugnance. How different an order from that to which we are accustomed, to which the sentimental would have us adhere! “Bury the dead out of my sight,” each one says in his heart. How sadly would we turn from the altered remains of those dear to us had they sojourned only a few weeks in the tomb: with what eyes would we regard the dreadful thing they would have become after the lapse of only a few months! that dreadful thing for which, as it has been well said, no name is found in any human language.

“And the graves were opened, and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and went into the holy city and appeared unto many.” These words will shortly be read to thousands in the Churches. How many of those thousands, I wonder, will try to realise to themselves what an appalling spectacle, if the ordinary conditions of decay were observed, such an apparition would be! I judge by my own feelings; for it has been my fortune, or rather

misfortune, to behold the body of a dead saint, not risen, it is true from the tomb, but immured within it. Those of you who have at any time visited Milan Cathedral will remember the grisly object to which I refer. In a subterranean Chapel beneath the Cathedral choir is a sarcophagus of stone, enclosing a shrine of transparent crystal, in which reposes, and for three hundred years has reposed, the corpse of St. Carlo Borroméo, Archbishop of Milan. By an ingenious mechanical contrivance the outer wall of stone can be removed, and the body of the dead saint exposed to view. Little more of him is seen than his face, which is black and shrivelled; his body is for the most part enveloped in costly robes which have outlasted their wearer, and on which a thousand jewels still gorgeously sparkle. You may have heard, perhaps, of that visitor to the Catacombs who was horrified to see lying in one of the chambers the dead body of a beautiful girl, still wearing the same ball-dress in which she had danced with him three nights before. No doubt the Catacombs can show many similar horrors; but I thought I had never beheld a more absolutely shocking sight than that dead saint in Milan Cathedral.

It was a relief after witnessing such a spectacle to turn my steps to another quarter of the town, and see before me the crematory temple which has been erected in the monumental cemetery. It presents, I must confess, a more imposing appearance than our modest structure at St. John's. On the occasion of my visit a large party was being shown over the interior. The official attendant explained minutely the manner in which the numerous cremations, some 20 or 30 a month, were there performed. Two systems are employed, one of which is the Gorini, but more elaborately conducted than our crematory admits of. By means of gas, in what is called the "quick" process, combustion is effected in 50 minutes: the "slow" process takes two hours. In one of the columbaria, or urn chapels, we were invited to examine some specimens of the remains of cremated persons, which lay for inspection on the table in a small oblong cist. The ladies of the party shrank from handling them; but to my mind nothing could have been less objectionable than the appearance they presented. They were like frosted silver, exquisitely pure, hard but not heavy to the touch, and of no perceptible smell. Strictly speaking they were not so much ashes as a refined solid sublimate. The niches in the walls of the columbarium were filled with urns containing similar remains, but unexposed. Most of the compartments were protected by a small door of marble, on which was engraved a name, with some suitable inscription. The

general impression made on the mind was of order, cleanliness, and tranquillity: "nothing but fair and good, and what may quiet us in a death so noble." If the sentimental objector to Cremation would be converted once for all, let him go to Milan, to the Chapel of St. Carlo, and afterwards visit the Crematorium.

I have purposely reserved to the last what may be called the social objection to Cremation; for it is the one to which the Cremationist himself attaches most importance, and indeed the only one which, philosophically viewed, appears a valid objection at all. It is objected that the complete destruction of the body, but for a few remaining ashes, which is effected by Cremation, would tend to encourage certain forms of crime, more especially the crime of poisoning. Even this objection, though somewhat formidable at first sight, is more apparent than real, and presents no very serious difficulty. It would of course be easy for the Cremationist to retort that under the present system not one body in a thousand is closely examined after death, nor one in a hundred thousand exhumed; but this would not be a sufficient answer to the opponent, who might fairly urge that with Burial exhumation is at least possible, whereas with Cremation it would be impossible. Nor is it enough to say with Sir Henry Thompson that certain portions of the body might be preserved, in which traces of irritant poison would, if anywhere, be detected. The practical inconvenience of this expedient would soon cause it to be dispensed with except under very suspicious circumstances, so that those cases would still remain unmet in which suspicion of foul play might arise long after the decease. The Cremation Society, with a view to meeting the objection more satisfactorily, has adopted the following precautions, by which all risk in the matter is reduced to a minimum:—

‘I. An application in writing must be made by the friends or executors of the deceased—unless it has been made by the deceased person himself during life—stating that it was the wish of the deceased to be cremated after death.

‘II. A certificate must be sent in by two qualified medical men one of whom attended the deceased until the time of death, unhesitatingly stating that the cause of death was natural, and what that cause was.

‘III. If no medical man attended during the illness, an autopsy must be made by a medical officer appointed by the Society, or no cremation can take place.’

The Council of the Society, it may be added, reserve the right in all cases of refusing permission for the performance of cremation.

By means of such precautions as these the chances in favour of the poisoner are rendered infinitesimal; or rather, the chances against him are considerably increased. It is upon record that in one of the Italian cities the official examination of a child's body, previous to its being cremated, proved that the child had been poisoned, apparently by sweetmeats; and this would not have been revealed had ordinary earth-burial taken place.

And if in spite of these safeguards any margin seems left for crime—and what human arrangement is there so close-fitting but that some opening may be found in it for man's perverted ingenuity?—I can only give it as my humble opinion that having regard to the general good, the social harm that might in rare cases result from Cremation is wholly insignificant in comparison with the systematic mischief wrought by Burial. We do not condemn the use of Chloroform because some one dies from an overdose of it, nor dispense with other blessings because they are occasionally abused. Better that one man should be poisoned because Cremation was the custom than that thousands should be poisoned because it is not.

I have thus endeavoured to show that the commonly urged objections to Cremation are for the most part unreasonable, and of little weight when compared with its solid advantages. Other objections might possibly be quoted, but none worth regarding; some so farcical that the mere mention of them is their best refutation. I believe it has been gravely objected that Cremation would deprive the future palæontologist of human skulls and bones to examine. The anatomist, it might more reasonably be complained, would want subjects for his dissecting room. Let neither prospect alarm us; there will always be a remnant uncremated. We shall bequeath quite as many skeletons to posterity as posterity will bless us for.

I venture to conclude these remarks with a word of practical exhortation. It is not enough for the Cremationist to gain your passive assent to his doctrine: your active help is required in its support; a mere languid approval of Cremation will not do. State clearly in writing your desire to be cremated after death; leave money for the purpose—a very small sum will suffice. A donation of ten guineas to the Cremation Society will insure the performance of the rite, provided all other necessary conditions are complied with. Your executors may not take the initiative in the

matter, but they will hardly venture to disobey your express injunctions, more especially if you make your other bequests conditional upon their being fulfilled. And meanwhile assist us to direct men's attention to the cause, to arouse their imagination and excite their interest. Let them recognise the facts of burial; let them learn that Cremation is not only desirable but practicable, and that there is no law in England to prevent it.

Above all things do not think there is no need for immediate action: that the question having waited so long can afford to wait a little longer. They are terribly mistaken who imagine that. The matter is imminently, alarmingly urgent. The problem how we are to dispose of our dead becomes every day more difficult. Now is the time for the right-minded to interfere before some preposterous Burial Reform is prescribed, which will itself but need reformation. What we want is not a revised version of Burial: revised versions are not often satisfactory. The advocates of Cremation appeal to the public to have done with Burial once for all. We appeal to you in the name of Common Sense not to lay up poison for yourselves; in the name of Morality, not to lay it up for your children. We appeal to you in the name of Economy not to waste good land and material, and squander money for the privilege of doing so. We appeal to you in the name of enlightened Sentiment and Religion, not to subject your dead to the slow horrors of decay, nor seek to hoard them in unavailing superstition; but to commit them reverently, unfearingly, and immediately to those elements that gave them birth; to comply with an order you cannot change; to help, not hinder, Nature in working out her immense designs; and so render a more reasonable service to that Power which Nature reveals to us—a God not of the dead but of the living.

Information as to the Cremation Society of England may be obtained from the Hon. Secretary, W. Eassie, Esq., C.E., at Argyll Street, London, W.

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